

Freedom in Christ

THE BATTLE FOR OUR MINDS

If you were asked this question, what answer would you give? Where is the biggest battle ground in human history? You're probably expecting me to say the answer is, of course, the cross on Calvary! We might look to other parts of human history and come up with some answers: Agincourt; the Somme; the battle of Britain? I want to suggest a different kind of answer. The biggest battle ground in human history does, I suggest, still exist today. It is present here this morning and it's in every one of us. It is the battleground of the mind. Where do all wars begin – of whatever kind? It's in the human mind isn't it? The human mind is the biggest battleground in history and still is today.

What goes on in your mind? Any action that you choose to take, any word that you choose to speak, any choice that you make begins in the mind. We know, don't we, that our mind is often a battleground. Have you ever wondered that that was true for Jesus too? Right at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus had a showdown in the desert with Satan.

'Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said "throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him "Away

from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Then the devil left him, and the angels came and attended him. (Mathew 4 1-11)

Have you ever thought about how we know about the temptations Jesus faced in the desert? You see – there were no witnesses to what happened were there! It was just the two of them: Jesus and Satan. Perhaps, in a daring display of vulnerability, it was Jesus who told his disciples what had happened: Jesus, displaying his humanity and perhaps Jesus demonstrating where the biggest battleground is – in the mind.

Scholar and present Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright, has a view of what happened that I find rather attractive. He suggests that rather than a real conversation with a visible figure, as perhaps we picture, these temptations appear as natural ideas in Jesus' own mind. In other words the battle here is in Jesus' own mind. And if these really were temptations, then the temptation must have been very real and it must have been a battle! Jesus resisted these temptations, because he won the battle in his mind!

There's another significant battle in the garden isn't there?

'He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.' Luke 22 v 41-44.

If there's a different way to do this – let me know, but the battle of the mind is won, I will do your will, not mine! The fact that he knelt to pray, that he prayed more earnestly, and that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground serve to show the intensity of the battle. And the battle for our minds is real today.

"Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." Ephesians 6 v 11.

Friends, the battle is real and the primary battleground is the battleground of our minds. The battle is against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Jesus called the devil the 'Father of lies' (John 8 v44) but the good news is, Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

In order for us to fight and win the battle, there are some truths we would do well to grasp and understand. Satan is not like God – he is a created being, he was given the authority to rule when Adam and Eve fell for his deception and lies. Satan and God are not equal and opposite powers – although Satan would like you to think that. It has been said that comparing Satan to God is like comparing an ant to an atomic bomb! Satan is not omnipresent – that is he can only be in one place at a time – because he is a created being! Satan's power and authority do not even begin to compare with God's.

“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them at the cross.” Colossians 2 v 15.

'Jesus is seated far above all rule and authority.' (Ephesians 1 v 21) Satan cannot perfectly read your mind. Every occult practice relates to the mind, or the future, and Satan doesn't know either perfectly – he does not know everything. Do you remember in Daniel chapter 2 – King Nebuchadnezzar asks the sorcerers to not only interpret his dreams, but tell him what he dreamt! They couldn't do it! They couldn't do it because Satan's demons cannot read the mind – so they couldn't tell the sorcerers what the king dreamt and neither could they interpret the king's dream. Satan cannot read your mind. Satan works through “rulers, authorities, powers and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6 v12). Basically Satan has a whole host of fallen angels working for him, and he uses them to put thoughts into peoples minds. Where did the thought in Jesus mind to turn stones to bread come from? Answer, Satan or one of his angels.

“The spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” (1 Tim 4 v 1) There are plenty of examples of this in the Bible. It happened at the last supper. “The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.” (John 13v2)

The Bible makes it clear that the devil had put the thought into Judas' mind. Judas lost the battle, acted on that thought – and when he realised the enormity of what he'd done, hanged himself.

The thoughts that Satan will put into our minds come in 3 ways:

- Temptation
- Accusation
- Deception

How many of you have experienced some form of temptation in the last week? Interesting thing about temptation is – you know its going on don't you – you know if you're being tempted! But we all experience temptation – regularly – don't we?

How many of you have struggled with the voice of the accuser this last week? Let me tell you about last Monday – I had lots of different things happen on Monday – it was a long day. As I was driving home, the thought that was going through my mind was – well, Ian, you managed to make a complete mess of today didn't you? I found myself re-playing almost everything I had done, and by the time I got home I was convinced I was a failure both as a man and a Minister! Let me tell you about Tuesday morning. On Tuesday morning when Sandra and I met to pray together, she said: "Ian, thank you for yesterday. I thought you were absolutely brilliant – I nearly phoned twice to tell you how good you'd been. Thank you because you were a real encouragement to me and I felt affirmed and valued in what I do." So... what was happening on Monday? I was listening to the voice of the accuser – 'you know you can't do this job, so stop pretending you can – and give it up Ian!' What happened on Tuesday? God spoke through Sandra!

How many of us this last week have been deceived? This is more difficult isn't it – because the nature of deception is that we won't know when we've been deceived. That's why Satan loves deception! That's why we need to learn Godly wisdom. If Satan can lead us into sin – he can gain a point of influence in our lives – a foothold. The word in the bible for foothold, literally means, place – do not give the devil a place in your life – because he will use it!

Now, friends, you need not be worried or troubled by all this! At least, not in the sense that you are in some way possessed by the devil. He is going to do anything he can to pull you away from God – and the subtler he can be, the better for him!

But... but.... but..... but God! Remember those words!

“And his incomparable great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Ephesians 1 v 19-23.

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2 v 6.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” Ephesians 3 v 20.

What do we need to do?

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” Ephesians 6 v 10-13

The belt of truth stands against the devil’s deception; the breastplate of righteousness stands against the devil’s accusations. The shield of faith stands against the devil’s assault on our minds, and friends, as we have said before we need to learn to cultivate a beautiful mind. To cultivate a mind that becomes the dwelling place of God. This is the mind where God is present and a new kind of

thought begins to flow. In John 10 Jesus says he is the good shepherd and his sheep recognise his voice and follow him. He says they will never follow a stranger because they don't recognize a stranger's voice. And God's primary way of speaking to us is in our minds. Friends, take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10 v 5). 'Prepare your minds for action' (1 Peter 1 v 13). Get to know God, read the bible, friends – the battle for our minds is a choice, the battle is real. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12 v 2) and fill it with the truth.

'Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.' (Philippians 4 v 8+9)

Amen.

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 30th Nov. 2008 – by Rev Ian Phillips.